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ABSTRACT

The impetus for public school desegregation in Portland came through the efforts of the local National Association for the Advancement of Colored People during the 1960's. The Portland Board of Education moved in 1963 to establish a blue ribbon, independent committee on education and race. This citizen's committee recommended a series of individual actions to be taken by the Portland Board of Education which would be aimed over time at desegregating the schools. The board of education accepted the recommendations. In 1964 the Portland board began a voluntary transfer program which involved the transportation of minority students to predominantly white schools. The following year, substantive educational policy changes were implemented which included the creation of model schools, the head start program, and compensatory learning activities. The voluntary administrative transfer system was strengthened in 1972 through the recruitment of 725 minority students into the program. This action was supported by more intensive inservice training for faculty and staff. From 1973 to 1975 the board of education continued its backing of desegregation actions through policy statements and guidelines, the development of early childhood centers in the inner city, support for reorganization, and symbolic moves such as a proposal for an annual school award for interracial understanding. Portland's desegregation effort has been limited in scope and limited in success. Because the desegregation program is voluntary, desegregation has not produced change throughout the city's schools. (Author/AM)

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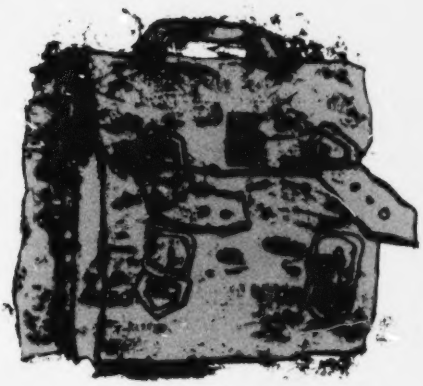

SCHOOL DESEGREGATION IN PORTLAND, OREGON

A STAFF REPORT OF
THE UNITED STATES COMMISSION
ON CIVIL RIGHTS

September 1977

UD017452

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
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PREFACE

The United States Commission on Civil Rights released on August 24, 1976, its report to the Nation: Fulfilling the Letter and Spirit of the Law: Desegregation of the Nation's Public Schools.

The report's findings and recommendations were based upon information gathered during a 10-month school desegregation project. This included four formal hearings (Boston, Massachusetts; Denver, Colorado; Louisville, Kentucky; and Tampa, Florida); four open meetings held by State Advisory Committees (Berkeley, California; Corpus Christi, Texas; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Stamford, Connecticut); a survey of nearly 1,300 local school districts; and 29 case studies of communities which had difficulties with desegregation, had moderate success with desegregation, or had substantial success with desegregation.

Subsequent to the report's release, considerable interest was generated concerning the specifics of the case study findings, which, owing to space limitations in the national report, were limited to a few brief paragraphs. In an effort to comply with public requests for more detailed information, Commission staff have prepared monographs for each of the case studies. These monographs were written from the extensive field notes already collected and supplemented, if needed, with further interviews in each community. They reflect, in detail, the original case study purpose of finding which local policies, practices, and programs in each community surveyed contributed to peaceful desegregation and which ones did not.

It is hoped that the following monograph will serve to further an understanding of the school desegregation process in this Nation.

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I. BACKGROUND

Demography

Portland is an inland port city situated near the juncture of the Willamette and Columbia Rivers. The city is well known for its mild climate and scenic beauty as well as its relative proximity to both the Pacific Ocean and the Cascade Range. Portland is a major commercial distribution and shipping center for the Pacific Northwest. It has significant numbers of its citizens working in industries such as food processing, textiles, timber processing, paper production, chemicals, and aluminum product manufacturing.

The 1970 census estimated Portland's total population at nearly 383,000 persons. Black residents numbered just over 21,500 (or 5.6 percent of the city's population), and persons of Hispanic origin totaled about 10,300 (or 2.6 percent of Portland's residents). Native Americans made up but a small proportion of Portland's population.[1]

Portland School District No. 1

Portland School District No. 1 includes 95 elementary schools, 14 high schools, and 16 special schools located in the city and in part in outlying suburban areas. Total student enrollment has substantially declined from a high of 77,445 in 1968; by 1975, total enrollment was down to 62,028 students, of whom 7,799 (or 12.7 percent) were black, and 1,316 (or 2.1 percent) were Asian American. Students of Hispanic origin numbered 834 (just over 1 percent of enrollment). Between 1968 and 1975 increased minority enrollment and decreased white enrollments resulted in a 6.2 percent increase in minority student enrollment over the 1968 figures.[2] (See table 1).

Portland's teaching staff was 3,209 for 1975 and included almost 9 percent minorities (mostly black teachers), an increase over 1968 when minorities were less than 4 percent of the system's teachers.[3] (See table 2).

TABLE 1

Student Enrollment
1968-1975

Fall	Am. Ind.	Black	Asian Am.	Sp. Sur.	All Others	Total
1968	468	6,304	986	708	68,979	77,445
1970	451	7,008	1,001	712	67,002	76,174
1972	463	7,307	1,030	784	59,806	69,400
1974	520	7,529	1,119	757	53,712	63,637
1975	684	7,799	1,316	834	51,395	62,028

Source: Portland School District No. 1, Portland, Oreg., 1976.

TABLE 2

Faculty Composition
1968-1975

Fall	Am. Ind.	Black	Asian Am.	Sp. Sur.	All Others	Total
1968	2	104	37	6	3,666	3,815
1970	3	151	43	8	3,375	3,580
1972	3	160	35	9	3,339	3,546
1974	3	204	48	15	3,114	3,384
1975	5	213	49	17	2,925	3,209

Source: Portland School District No. 1, Portland, Oreg., 1976.

II. THE EVOLUTION OF DESEGREGATION

Initial Desegregation Activities

The impetus for public school desegregation in Portland came through the efforts of the local National Association for the Advancement of Colored People during the 1960s. The NAACP's work in the community shaped public attitudes and led to a voluntary desegregation process which came as an expression of the community's will on the issue.

The Portland Board of Education moved in 1963 to establish a blue ribbon, independent citizens' committee on education and race. The 46-member group was charged with studying problems of racial isolation in the Portland schools and recommending solutions. By 1964 the group was able to report its findings to the Portland school board: The citizens' committee recommended a series of individual actions to be taken by the Portland Board of Education which would be aimed over time at desegregating the local schools. The board of education accepted the recommendations of the study committee and in ensuing years used these recommendations as a basis for official action.[4]

Voluntary Transfer Program and Educational Policy Changes

In 1964 the Portland board began a voluntary transfer program which involved the transportation of minority students to predominately white schools.[5] (See table 3) The following year, substantive educational policy changes were implemented which included the creation of model schools, the head start program, and compensatory learning activities.

The voluntary transfer program was carried out with 507 minority students attending schools by 1968 in both

the suburbs and in other areas of the city; the program was to reduce racial isolation in some cases and in others to alleviate overcrowding. In 1966 the schools began a program of inservice staff training to support intergroup and interracial contacts in the schools.

Portland Schools for the Seventies Plan

In 1969 Dr. Richard W. Blanchard became superintendent of the Portland schools and began a review of the operations of the local system. The following year Dr. Blanchard presented to the board of education a plan titled "Portland Schools for the Seventies," which called for the reorganization and revitalization of the local public school system. The plan was adopted by the board of education and included recommendation for:

- the decentralization of the school district into three administrative areas;
- the creation of advisory committees for each administrative area;
- the establishment of middle schools; and
- the development of early childhood centers in inner-city areas.

The subsequent failure of a vital school bond issue to win voter approval blocked implementation of Superintendent Blanchard's basic reorganizational changes. Dr. Blanchard and the board of education then moved to a more limited approach of restructuring Portland's schools through the closing of one school, the establishment of an early childhood center, boundary changes, and the acceleration of the administrative transfer program (which was begun in 1964 at the urging of the blue ribbon citizens' committee on education and race).

The voluntary administrative transfer system was strengthened in 1972 through the recruitment of 725 minority students into the program. This action was supported by more intensive inservice training for faculty and staff.

From 1973 to 1975 the board of education continued its backing of desegregation actions through policy

statements and guidelines, the development of early childhood centers in the inner city, support for reorganization, and symbolic moves such as a proposal for an annual school award for interracial understanding.[6]

Desegregation in Portland has evolved over time through voluntary transfers of teachers and voluntary administrative transfers of students, with "one-way" busing of minority (mainly black) students from inner-city schools to predominately white ones a notable feature. By 1975, 2,346 minority students (out of a total of 10,533) were being transported from the city's predominately black schools. About 484 white students volunteered during the same period to be bused to largely black schools.[7] The development of multicultural teaching and learning materials has been an important element in Portland's efforts to capitalize on the desegregation of its schools.[8]

TABLE 3

Percentage of Students Bused
1962-1967

Year	Percent Bused
1962	6 percent (2d year before desegregation)
1963	6 percent (1st year before desegregation)
1964	9 percent (1st year of desegregation)
1965	9 percent (2d year of desegregation)
1966	10 percent (3d year of desegregation)
1967	10 percent (4th year of desegregation)

Source: Portland School District No. 1, Portland, Oreg., 1976.

III. IMPLEMENTATION

Public Information and Support

Good communications and a sense of openness about the desegregation process have characterized the years since 1964 when desegregation began in Portland. The school system has regularly acted to keep parents and faculty informed and at ease with regard to desegregation activities. For example, meetings held in the sending and receiving schools provided advance notice of desegregation-related actions, made specific program information available, and encouraged question and answer sessions among parents, faculty, and administrators.

The Portland schools used a variety of other means to facilitate school desegregation. A central information center was established which could be contacted for answers to individual questions. The center also issued news releases and distributed orientation materials outlining the administrative transfer program. To seek out potential transfer students, the schools hired a part-time recruiting team of 12 community persons and school district employees, including parents of students already in the administrative transfer program, teacher aides, and teachers.[9]

Inservice Training

From 1970 to 1972, the Portland schools acted to provide supportive inservice training to faculty and other school staff on desegregation matters. Training lasted 4 weeks and included workshops, seminars, and retreats. The focus of the inservice training was on human relations questions and concerns which would inevitably arise in the emerging mmulticultural and multiethnic school environment. However, since attendance at the training was not required by the

schools, only 150 teachers participated. (The teachers who did participate in the inservice training expressed mixed opinions about its quality and effectiveness.) The Portland schools also granted teachers credit for college courses which related to desegregation.

Community Relations

There was no organized opposition to the desegregation of Portland's schools. The burden of busing was carried by minority students and thus white parents generally looked upon Portland school desegregation with dispassion (or approval). Minority parents were cautious, but generally accepted desegregation in the belief that it would provide their children with a better education. Some minority parents voiced concern that only their children were bused. Desegregation went forward with limited minor incidents of violence. No active police involvement was necessary.[10]

As school desegregation in Portland became a reality, a coalition of several community groups, including the NAACP, the Urban League, and the local Council of Churches was actively involved in meetings initiated by the school administration. The Portland Council of Churches, which supported desegregation, provided a communications link throughout the community during desegregation.

White and minority teachers in Portland were generally neutral on the question of school desegregation, and the teachers' union took no formal position. Business and political leaders took no active steps to assist the desegregation effort and, instead, remained neutral on the issue.

The Portland news media reported the early desegregation experience in a factual and accurate manner, but some minority parents believed that subsequent reporting was not completely accurate.

Desegregation and the Educational Budget

The Portland school district absorbed most new costs associated with desegregation. Emergency School Aid Act (ESAA)[11] funds were used for supplementary education programs in receiving schools. Expenditures of ESAA dollars have ranged between a high of $455,000 in 1972-73 (the first year of funding) and the 1975-76 figure of $386,000.[12] (See tables 4 and 5).

TABLE 4

Amounts of ESAA Funds for Supplementary Education
1972-1976

Year	ESAA Funds
1972-73	$455,000
1973-74	378,000
1974-75	400,000
1975-76	386,000

Source: Dr. Ernest Hartzog, associate superintendent of education, Oct. 12, 1976.

TABLE 5

Percent of Budget for Busing
1962-1975

Year	Percent
1962	1.0 percent (2d year before desegregation)
1963	1.0 percent (1st year before desegregation)
1964	1.3 percent (1st year of desegregation)
1965	1.3 percent (2d year of desegregation)
1972	1.8 percent (7th year of desegregation)
1975	2.9 percent (10th year of desegregation)

Source: Portland School District No. 1, Portland, Oreg., 1976.

IV. EFFECTS OF DESEGREGATION

Interracial Attitudes and Relations

Portland citizens consistently cited improved student relations and attitudes on race as one of the most important results of desegregation. Persons concerned with education in Portland identified several problem areas which have surfaced since desegregation, such as insufficient funding for desegregation activities, insensitivity toward minority children in the predominately white schools to which they were transported, discipline trouble, negative attitudes about desegregation among some staff, and the possible loss of some student leaders from black schools.

Of these concerns, discipline problems and insensitivity toward the needs of minority children were cited most frequently. Interviews in the community indicated that blacks cited the apparent insensitivity of whites most often and whites most frequently cited discipline problems as negative aspects of local desegregation.

Positive attitudes about desegregation in the white community are also apparent, but the attitudes in the black community are somewhat less positive than they were at one time. The attitude of the community may result in part, from the fact that white children are not transferred. The burden of busing is carried mainly by minority students. Some members of the black community expressed resentment of this burden and are not convinced that their children have been received hospitably in predominately white schools. Additionally, the transfer of black teachers has aroused resistance. As early as 1969 there was litigation concerning the hiring, assignment, promotion, and recruitment of black teachers, and some of these problems are still said to exist.

Administrators and Desegregation

Portland school administrators continue to be united in support of desegregation. Efforts are being made to sustain the thrust for desegregation and to broaden approaches to its achievement by increasing the number of early childhood centers in the inner city and by encouraging more white students to participate in the administrative transfer program.[13]

Curriculum and Achievement

Test scores of Portland students have shown little significant change in achievement levels since desegregation. The introduction of multicultural educational materials and course work such as black history have been included as major curriculum changes. More compensatory education courses are now available for students, particularly minorities. Limited concern was expressed that these courses might have the net effect of reducing the availability of special programs for high achievers, but no evidence was available with regard to this concern.

V. CURRENT STATUS OF DESEGREGATION

Portland's desegregation effort has been limited in scope and, therefore, limited in success. Because the heart of the desegregation program has been a voluntary, administrative transfer system which involved for the most part minority students, desegregation has not produced change throughout the city's schools. In 1975, the Office of Education of the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare notified the Portland school system that racially identifiable schools still existed in that community.[14] Another problem area rests with the continuing feeling among some members of the minority population that the burden of the desegregation process has been borne by minorities. One expressed fear is that the white community's heretofore generalized acceptance of desegregation may be threatened if a heavier burden is placed on whites in the future implementation of desegregation.

VI. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

1. The desegregation process in Portland, Oregon, is and has been voluntary and began with the report on race and education by a select citizens' committee. The committee acknowledged Portland's responsibility to ensure educational opportunity for all the city's children and to take affirmative steps to reduce racial isolation in the public schools.

The school board appointed a blue ribbon committee to study the impact of racial isolation on education and formulate policy recommendations to minimize such isolation. The committee took the first significant active steps in Portland to address the question of racial isolation in the public schools. The committee's recommendations served initially as guidelines for the desegregation of Portland's schools.

2. Local leaders, particularly school district administrators and religious and civic leaders, looked upon desegregation as desirable.

Firm and positive leadership demonstrated by the superintendent of education, the board of education, the Portland Council of Churches, and the Portland chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People positively influenced the outcome of desegregation.

Lines of communication between the school district and the affected Portland communities were kept open, and this communication dispelled confusion and fears about desegregation.

3. Portland school administrators and community leaders invested time and resources in order to deal with misconceptions about desegregation.

In preparation for desegregation, Portland School District No. 1 sponsored inservice training for teachers and a series of meetings in the sending and receiving schools to familiarize faculty and parents with the desegregation process. The school district also created a 12-member staff assigned to the recruitment of transfer students.

The Portland schools also set up an information center to answer questions, issue news releases, and distribute orientation materials about the administrative transfer program. The school district regularly worked with concerned community groups to sponsor meetings to discuss the implementation of desegregation.

NOTES

1. Data from 1970 Census of Population and Housing.

2. Data provided by Portland School District, No. 1, Portland, Ore., 1976.

3. Ibid.

4. From Feb. 2-5, 1976, the Commission's Western Regional Office staff and members of the Oregon Advisory Committee conducted a case study on desegregation in Portland. Twenty-three persons were interviewed, including members of the school board, the superintendent, the administrative head of the desegregation task force, a teachers' union representative, principals and assistant principals, students, teachers, parents, leaders of community organizations, religious and business leaders, elected public officials, and media representatives. Unless cited otherwise, all information cited in this case study is derived from these interviews, which are on file in the Commission's Western Regional Office, Los Angeles, Calif.

5. The terms "voluntary transfer program" and "administrative transfer program" are used interchangeably in this report.

6. Information on desegregation in Portland is taken from the Racial Balance Report for Portland School District No. 1, Report to the Superintendent (1975), p. 3 (cited hereafter as Racial Balance Report).

7. Racial Balance Report, p. 10.

8. Portland School District No. 1, Emergency School Aid Act (ESAA), Title VII Project Proposal, Appendix A, Desegregation Plan (1976), p. A-8.

9. Dr. Ernest Hartzog, associate superintendent of education, telephone interview, Oct. 12, 1976 (cited hereafter as Hartzog interview).

10. Bruce Baker, chief of police, telephone interview, January 1976.

11. 20 U.S.C. §1601 et seq. (Supp. IV, 1974).

12. Hartzog interview.

13. Dr. Robert W. Blanchard, superintendent of schools, interview, Sept. 14, 1976.

14. Herman R. Goldberg, associate commissioner, Equal Educational Opportunity, Office of Education, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, letter to Dr. Robert W. Blanchard, superintendent of schools, Portland Public Schools, 1975.

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